

**Developing Customer Service Awareness
in the
Sussex Fire Department**

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Abstract

The Sussex Fire Department needed to improve and formalize its customer service and public relations programs. The purpose of this research project was to assess opportunities for improvement in the attitudes of department personnel towards improving customer service, research current fire service thinking in the area of customer service and develop a tool to gauge customer service perception. Additionally, the staff needed to begin to develop and improve department policies and procedures around the concept of improving customer service.

A descriptive research method was used for this research project. Research questions included the following: What information is currently available regarding customer satisfaction and customer relations programs in the fire service? What instrumentation can be developed to measure public satisfaction of the Sussex Fire Department's services? What is the perception of customer service held by department personnel? What can be done by department personnel to improve customer service? To answer these questions the following tools were employed: A survey of community businesses regarding customer service satisfaction. A survey of department personnel's perception of customer service. Development of a customer satisfaction survey form. Information from participants of an EFO class was gathered in a survey regarding customer service programs from a large cross-section of fire departments.

Data gathered seemed to indicate that the public was satisfied with department performance, however fire department personnel felt that there was room for improvement on the part of the department in its training and SOPs.

The research resulted in modification training programs and fine tuning some department SOPs to promote customer satisfaction. The awareness of the importance of good customer service began to develop among department personnel. As a result of the research it was recommended that the concept of customer service be “sold” to all levels of the organization. It would be applied wherever feasible and it must be practiced by personnel at all levels. To ensure the success of this program a commitment to customer service must be shared throughout the organization.

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Introduction

More than ever, today's fire service is competing for support, both politically and financially, in a effort to survive as a service provider. The Sussex Fire Department also must prepare to meet the challenge of securing funding for operations and garnering public support. Developing a positive philosophy of customer service relations was the goal of department. The problem was that the department had no formal program to achieve this goal. There was no mission statement defining this goal. Written policies or standard operating guidelines did not address the goal. There was no measurement tool to determine what the public's perception was of operations. And finally, the departments training program did not address the concept of customer service.

One purpose of this research project was to evaluate the attitudes and perceptions of department personnel toward customer service. A department-wide survey was administered to gather data and collect suggestions to improve services. Another purpose was to develop a customer satisfaction evaluation form to gauge the publics perception of the departments performance. Sample surveys from other fire deparments were collected and evaluated. A department committee then developed a customer satisfaction survey. The committee also developed a list of suggestions to help educate department personnel regarding customer service relations. A review of contemporary literature was done to gather information regarding customer services in

the emergency response services. Much of this information was found in fire service management publications, although other industries can be used as a source of information.

Research questions for this paper included:

1. What information is currently available regarding customer satisfaction and customer relations programs in the fire service?
2. What instrumentation can be developed to measure public satisfaction for the Sussex Fire Department's services?
3. What is the perception of customer service held by department personnel?
4. What can be done by department personnel to improve customer service?

The results of this type of project will be most accurately viewed over a long period of time. It was hoped that behavioral changes in department personnel would be brought about through training and awareness, thus resulting in a positive public perception of the department. To assess customer satisfaction a survey was developed to monitor department performance.

Background and Significance

The Village of Sussex Fire Department provides emergency incident response services to the community. This includes fire suppression, emergency medical services, vehicle crash-rescue, level “B” hazardous materials incident response, cold-water rescue, and other services typical of most fire departments. The department is staffed with fifty (50) paid-on-call personnel and one full-time fire inspector. The community is a mix of suburban, residential, light industry, commercial businesses, and some rural areas. The fire response area of the Sussex Fire Department is growing rapidly as it adds new territory through annexation.

As the community has grown so has the fire department’s call volume. This has resulted in increased operating and capital expenditures. Since all other forms of government services are experiencing similar operating pressures, the fire department found it has had to compete more aggressively for its share of the municipal tax dollars. An important aspect of successfully promoting the department’s budget needs is to have strong public support for the fire department. This requires educating department personnel to be customer oriented. While the fire department enjoys a monopoly in the offering of emergency services at this time, this may not always be the case as privatization and consolidation become options that municipal governments must look at to provide services at the best level and at a reasonable costs to the taxpayers.

Fire departments often make the mistake of identifying only the residents who call for services, whether fire or EMS, as being their customers. It's important to realize that all residents, businesses and visitors to a community have an interest in emergency services. The occupants of the community are concerned not only from a standpoint of paying for the service, but also in the knowledge and security that the service is there to protect them and their families if it ever is needed. This is viewed in much the same way an insurance policy is maintained by people.

The trend to recognize the value of customer service is not new in the fire service. It had been around for a few years, and it was not unique to the fire service. For that reason the fire service should understand that its customers, including taxpayers and recipients of services, have an understanding of the importance of customer service in other aspects of their lives. They may be either recipients or providers of services in their own jobs.

Beginning in 1997 the Sussex Fire Department began reviewing its level of customer service awareness in an effort to improve its services and probably more importantly to improve the public's perception of the department's services. This was done through training, education, and customer satisfaction surveys. The department took a look at the methods of other departments for gathering feedback for services provided.

The Village of Sussex administrative staff conducted a survey of area businesses regarding their satisfaction of services provided to the community. The fire department developed a customer satisfaction form based on sample used by other fire departments around the country. A department-wide survey examined the knowledge and understanding of customer satisfaction held by department personnel. Training programs were modified to incorporate the importance of customer relations.

The goal of this entire effort was to improve the level of services offered and improve the public's perception of the fire department services. While not enough time has passed to properly measure the effect of the departments efforts, early indications were positive regarding the program. The Sussex Fire Department has never had a formal complaint lodged against it. One measure of satisfaction over the years has been the number of "thank-you" notes received from persons who received services from the department. Although these donations began increasing in mid-1997, this could not be taken as absolute proof of success of the departments efforts due to the limited amount of data available.

This project was relative to the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program, Executive Leadership, because of the need for strong leadership skills in implementing a new program that was not part of traditional department operations. This project involved changing the way personnel perceived their role in the delivery of

services as well as the department's role in the community. For some department personnel it was a major paradigm shift to stop viewing recipients of our services as "victims who ought to be grateful that we showed up" and begin viewing them as customers who have legitimate expectations.

Literature Review

The majority of the literature reviewed discussed the importance of positive customer service relations for emergency incident responders, whether it was for fire suppression, emergency medical services, hazardous materials incidents, or other types of emergencies. Several of the articles discussed new and innovative ways that services were being delivered in an effort to improve the public's perception of the fire department.

Perhaps an important place to start in the process of improving customer service is to accurately identify your customers. Dr. Robert Fleming used the term *stakeholders* to describe the importance of identifying those affected by the fire departments operations. According to Fleming, "The concept of stakeholders is widely recognized within successful contemporary business organizations. Stakeholders include all individuals, groups and organizations that affect or are affected by the actions or lack of actions of an organization" (Fleming, 1997, p.7). Fleming identified these

stakeholders as residents, workers, visitors or people traveling through the community, businesses, governmental agencies, community infrastructure groups (schools, utilities, banks, etc), neighboring communities, and all other individuals, groups, and organizations affected by the fire department. As the Sussex Fire Department began to address customer service it examined each of the groups Fleming suggested and identified members of each group relative to Sussex. It was an eye-opener for many personnel to see how many people and entities were affected by department operations.

A logical step in developing customer service would be identifying the expectations of your customers. Chief Harry Diezel and Community Relations Coordinator, Cathy Anderson, of the Virginia Beach (Va.) Fire Department recommend developing a two-part customer survey. They state “The first part should ask what they expect from their fire department under response conditions” (Anderson, Diezel, 1996, p.72). They suggested that the responses will probably come back that people will want promptness, efficiency, and caring.

Customer service needs to be tailored to individual departments. According to Pamela Bramblette “...delivery of customer service by the Phoenix Fire Department is vastly different than that delivered by the Chicago Fire Dept.” (Bramblette, 1997, p. 4). Bramblette suggest that cities are vastly different in governmental, social, and environmental aspects, therefore service demands will be different. The Sussex Fire

Department developed plans to distribute a survey to gauge the expectations of its customers. In addition it examined the demographics of the community. It found a growing population of elderly persons as well as young married couples with small children. The business community is also growing rapidly and their needs for information and services became apparent, prompting changes in the delivery of services from the fire prevention and inspection bureau.

After examining the expectations for the delivery of services in the community, it would follow that the actual delivery of services should be examined to determine if those expectations are being met. One area that is constantly under scrutiny is the delivery of emergency medical services. Lauren Simon Ostrow discussed efforts on a national scale to keep EMS in the fire service. Ostrow explained “ The new year started out with a bang as the fire service on a national and local level made efforts to solidify its position as an important player in EMS” (Ostrow, 1997, p.22). She described efforts by many state and national organizations to retain EMS as a fire department service. The Sussex Fire Department, through its involvement in the Waukesha County Association of Fire Chiefs, and other organizations keeps a pulse on the efforts of privatization of EMS delivery in southeastern Wisconsin.

Constant monitoring of quality of service and cost effectiveness are important. Fred Thorp reminds fire service management personnel of the constant threat of

privatization, “Local government agencies are quietly gathering information to determine if indeed privatization or managed competition is an answer for harried taxpayers and beleaguered elected officials” (Thorp, 1997, p.7). Gifford Pinchot described the effect that creating competition had on the U.S. Forest service when customers were allowed to choose between two regional service centers “Once customers had a choice, the centers got honest and compelling feedback. Without having to be told what to do, they transformed themselves into cost-effective, customer-focused, technical service organizations” (Pinchot, 1996, 34). This was significant in that the popular management theories of contemporary times must always be taken into account. Buzz words such as down-sizing, out-sourcing, and privatization can not be ignored.

The privatization of the Estero Fire Department by the Wackenhut Corp. got the attention of the fire service in a big way. According to Marion Garza and Lauren Ostrow “Privatized fire service makes up less than 1 percent of all firefighting operations in this country, yet recent moves by Wackenhut and Rural/Metro have caused chiefs and firefighters alike - especially in volunteer departments - to sit up and take notice” (Garza & Ostrow, 1997, p.20).

To foster support, the fire department must constantly educate the public about its mission. According to Harry Carter and Erwin Rausch “Fire departments must

devote both time and effort to promoting and maintaining a public awareness of the benefits obtained from the expenditures on fire protection in the community” (Carter, Rausch, 1989, p.148). It would be difficult to obtain data regarding customer satisfaction from a public that is not properly informed. The Sussex Fire Department occasionally finds that new residents to the community assume that there was a full-time career department serving the village, because that was what they had in their previous community. Once properly informed, this had a bearing on their expectations for response times and staffing levels.

Gathering accurate data is important to the planning process. Robert Burns explains one of the reasons that planning is vital “Most fire protection agencies are experiencing escalating demands for fire suppression and fire prevention services, fire safety education, emergency medical services, and hazardous materials control” (Burns, 1988, p.77). This has been especially applicable to the Sussex Fire Department as the community continues to grow rapidly.

Convincing firefighters that they need to be proactive in customer service can be tough. According to Randy Templeton of the Austin Fire Department, firefighters have to realize that their perspective on customer service is only one view. Templeton says “The toughest concept to accept initially is that it’s the customers, not the service providers, who define what constitutes good service” (Templeton, 1996, p.58).

The Village of Sussex conducted a survey entitled “Village of Sussex Business Retention Study” in May of 1997 that found that the services of the Sussex Fire Department were rated very highly (Sussex, May 1997, p. 9-11). The department decided to conduct its own survey in the future to find out what areas could be improved upon.

No study of fire service customer relations could be complete without reviewing the work of Chief Alan Brunacini of the Phoenix Fire Department. Brunacini has long been acknowledged as an innovator in the fire service. According to Brunacini (1997) “Perhaps customer service becomes the next logical area we must take on in our ongoing developmental process.” The officers of the Sussex Fire Department were provided with copies of this textbook to be used at future officer development training programs.

The literature provided information to use as references to implement some of the customer service concepts currently being utilized throughout the fire service. As trends emerge proactive departments are changing the way they do business and are redefining their relationships with their customers. The staff of the Sussex Fire Department will be continuously reviewing various sources of literature to develop additional ideas for evaluating and improving its customer service awareness.

Procedures

A descriptive research methodology was used for this study. The focus was to examine the perception of the public and department personnel of customer service relative to the Sussex Fire Department's delivery of emergency services in the community. Literature was reviewed to gain a broader perspective of an industry-wide view of the role of customer service.

Research questions for this paper included:

1. What information is currently available regarding customer satisfaction and customer relations programs in the fire service?
2. What instrumentation can be developed to measure public satisfaction for Sussex Fire Department's services?
3. What is the perception of customer service held by department personnel?
4. What can be done by department personnel to improve customer service?

Research tasks developed to answer the research questions:

1. A survey of community businesses regarding customer service satisfaction.
2. A survey of department personnel's perception of customer service.
3. Development of a customer satisfaction survey form.

4. Information from an EFO class was gathered in a survey regarding customer service programs from a large cross-sectional fire departments.

Instrumentation

A study of the business community in the Village of Sussex examined their opinions of the performance of the Sussex Fire Department. A total of ninety-one businesses, 28 manufacturing firms and 63 retail firms, were surveyed on an eight page survey entitled “Village of Sussex Business Retention Survey”. Information relative to the fire department can be found in Appendix C. The survey did not delineate between the various types of fire department services received. It was recommended to the village staff to modify this survey accordingly in the future.

A customer satisfaction questionnaire was developed to survey future customers. Recipients of department services such as fire suppression, emergency medical services, or other emergencies response services will receive a questionnaire. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix A. The department decided that the results of this instrument would be monitored on an ongoing basis and data would be compiled annually to be included in the departments annual report.

A questionnaire to examine the perceptions of department personnel was developed. The greatest benefit to this survey was the compiling of suggestions to

improve customer satisfaction in the future. The personnel questionnaire and the results of that instrument are found in Appendix B.

A survey was conducted of chief officers attending the National Fire Academy's *Executive Leadership* course during the summer of 1997 regarding customer satisfaction and quality assurance programs conducted by their fire departments. The survey and its results are contained in Appendix D. This group included fire department chief officers from around the United States and Australia. This is a relatively low number of respondents for a survey of national and international representation. This data can not be used to draw any type of general conclusion due to the lack of balance in representing the fire service as a whole. This group lacked representation from the volunteer fire service which makes up a large part of this nations fire service. The data is included only for general information purposes.

Population

In 1997 the Sussex Fire Department was made up of 50 paid-on-call members. The department consisted of the chief, 3 deputy chiefs, 4 captains, 4 lieutenants, and 38 firefighter/EMTs. The department had one full-time fire inspector. All department personnel were surveyed. According to the 1996 annual report, in 1996 the department responded to 325 calls, approximately 75% EMS calls and 25% other types of calls.

The Village of Sussex is a suburban community located approx. 20 miles west of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It is an expanding community with a growing commercial and industrial base. The community is surrounded by residential and rural areas. The 1996 population was approximately 7000 in a 5 square mile area.

Limitations

The following limitations were recognized throughout the study.

1. The research was limited to the Sussex Fire Department, Sussex, Wisconsin during 1997. The results of the study were influenced by the local demographics and socio/economic factors.
2. Information derived from the survey of National Fire Academy EFOP students is not representative of the national and/or international fire service due to the lack of representation of volunteer fire department chief officers, and the limited number of persons surveyed (20).
3. The survey questions were authored by the researcher and were validated internally.
4. Customer service and customer satisfaction is a relatively new topic of interest for the fire service. More research is needed over a longer period of time in this area to provide more accurate data.

Results

The results of this research project are addressed in the order of the research questions.

What information is currently available regarding customer satisfaction and customer relations programs in the fire service?

A review of the literature provided an insight into current fire service involvement in customer service, customer satisfaction and customer relations programs. A survey of twenty chief officers in the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program during the summer of 1997 yielded a limited amount of information in this area (Appendix D). Of the students surveyed, 50 percent were chief officers of combination departments and 50 percent represented career departments. These officers served populations grouped as; <5000 (1), 5000-10000 (1), 10000-50000 (9), and >50000 (9). The service areas were listed as primarily suburban and urban with a few listing rural or industrial/commercial. All provided fire suppression services, all but one provided EMS, and most provided other services such as haz mat or various special services.

Various forms of training and methods for reviewing service delivery were described in the survey. Fifty-five percent of those surveyed did no department-wide training regarding customer service or public relations. Of the services offering EMS, 85% did have some type of quality assurance program with their medical director or hospital, 15% did not. Post incident analysis sessions, in varying degrees of regularity, were conducted by 50% of those surveyed. Formal customer satisfaction assessment programs were conducted by 30% of the respondents, while 70% reported that they had no such formal program. Some had informal programs conducted on an irregular basis. A variety of methods of gathering feedback are listed in Appendix D, question 9. These included post cards, door-to-door surveys, survey cards, hospital feedback programs, random surveys, surveys with follow-up phone calls, and other types of general services surveys conducted by cities that included fire department service evaluations. When asked to describe changes that organizations had made due to customer service issues, several actions were described. They included: internal investigations, instituting survey programs, increased public education programs, new department SOPs, and disciplinary actions. Most customer complaints were handled by chief officers at various levels within various parameters. Some programs and procedures were more formalized than others.

What instrumentation can be developed to measure public satisfaction for the Sussex Fire Department's services?

As a result of the research conducted, a quality assurance survey was developed by the personnel of the Sussex Fire Department (Appendix A). The survey addresses the courtesy of personnel, including the dispatchers. It also addresses the technical skills, appearance, and response times. Respondents are encouraged to make comments and provide suggestions regarding the delivery of services. They may also provide their name and address (optional) so department personnel can follow-up with a phone call or letter as may be appropriate. The survey will be mailed to recipients of fire department services.

What is the perception of customer service held by department personnel?

A survey of all 50 department personnel was conducted to assess their perception of customer service delivery. It included the following data:

Table 1: Department Survey Data

Does the Sussex Fire Department adequately address customer service and satisfaction in its emergency incident operation?	
Yes	No
(36 or 72%)	(14 or 28%)
Do the training and orientation programs adequately address the importance of customer service and satisfaction?	
Yes	No
(12 or 24%)	(38 or 76%)
Do you feel that most of our contact with the public yields positive feeling toward the department?	

Yes

(48 or 96%)

No

(2 or 4%)

The majority (72%) felt that the issue was adequately addressed regarding department incident response. One comment received suggested spending more time with victims families at scenes to offer reassurance and explain the actions of the department. Issues such as professional appearance and behavior at the scene were brought out. This included proper uniforms and personnel “smoking and joking” when in view of public. More post incident analysis sessions were requested, primarily as learning tools for newer personnel. Only 24% of the personnel felt that the concept of customer service was adequately addressed as part of training sessions. One example of modifying training was the concept of limiting damage during overhaul and making sure a homeowner is given a thorough explanation of the need for aggressive overhaul. More emphasis needs to be placed on customer service in recruit orientation. Most of the department personnel (96%) felt that the public had positive feelings toward the fire department. One respondent commented that this was all a waste of time and energy. Most other suggestions focused on more training being provided to department members and providing more public education. A public relations program utilizing local newspapers was suggested to reinforce the departments image in the community.

A business retention survey of area businesses and manufacturers in the area showed a very positive perception of the fire department. The survey was conducted by the village staff and addressed all services provided. It resulted in the following data:

Table 2: Business Retention Survey

<u>Service</u>	<u>Contact Satisfied</u>	<u>Contact Dissatisfied</u>	<u>Contact NoOpinion</u>	<u>No Contact</u>
<i>Manufacturing Firms</i>				
Fire Department	40.74%	0.00%	0.00%	59.26%
Fire Inspector	85.19%	11.11%	0.00%	3.70%
<i>Retail Firms</i>				
Fire Department	36.07%	1.64%	1.64%	60.66%
Fire Inspector	76.67%	10.00%	11.67%	1.67%
<i>Manufacturing Firms</i>				
		<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	
Fire protection services satisfactory?		100.00%	0.00%	
<i>Retail Firms</i>				
		<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	
Fire protection services satisfactory?		98.36%	1.64%	

The fire department had the highest rating of all Village of Sussex services (Appendix C). Nearly all businesses that had contact with the fire department reported that they were satisfied with the services delivered. The fire inspector had a few more dissatisfied customers (11.11% in manufacturing and 10% in retail). While this was to be expected, the department addressed this issue through various efforts to make businesses aware of the importance of fire prevention and inspection. Customer service awareness training was provided for the inspection staff. The village staff regularly sends employees to training seminars to improve public relations. The fire department may be participating in some of these types of seminars in the future.

Discussion

The results of this research project seem to be in line with the information discussed in the literature review. The general population is becoming aware of the importance of customer service. Most businesses have programs to make their employees aware of the importance of customer service and value of cost effective service. For that reason most people are familiar with these concepts and have grown to expect good service. The threat of privatization has many in the fire service concerned. It seems that fire departments in the transition from traditional volunteer departments to combination or career departments are vulnerable to the privatization

threat. One way to avoid this is by making the public see the best possible level of service from their existing service providers.

The survey conducted among the EFO class chief officers (Appendix D) showed that a number of organizations are beginning to address the concept of customer service. Most departments that provided emergency medical services to their community had some form of quality assurance program through their hospital or medical control. Post incident analysis is another form used by many departments. Unfortunately these sessions often turn into critiques as opposed to opportunities for improvement. One thing that was evident in the comments received in the surveys was the fact that many programs result from problems. In other words departments are often reactive as opposed to proactive in developing customer service programs and public relations programs. There is now enough material available to develop programs and SOPs in a proactive fashion.

The survey of Sussex Fire Department personnel showed a lack of understanding on the part of many personnel regarding the concept of customer service and public relations. Many people simply did not view the people the department comes in contact as customer, but rather they were viewed as victims. A few felt that the public should be happy just for the fact that the fire department shows up. Many good suggestions were developed to improve training and delivery of services. As a

result new recruit orientation, as well as ongoing training programs, will include material on customer service. Department personnel also developed an instrument for gauging personnel performance. This quality assurance survey (Appendix B) will be given to customers following an incident.

Recommendations

Reviewing current literature regarding customer service and public relations provided a host of ideas to improve the delivery of services by the Sussex Fire Department. These were reviewed by the officers of the department and prioritized. The first to be implemented will be the Quality Assurance Survey (Appendix A). Results of this survey will be tabulated for six months before any definitive action is take. Minor corrections deemed important enough may be implemented immediately with proper training and modification to SOPs. The collection of literature reviewed will be used in department-wide training sessions to improve personnel awareness to customer service and public relations. The literature reviewed was provided to department personnel in hopes that individual officers and members would develop additional ideas for future implementation.

The survey of EFO students (Appendix D) provided some insight into what other organizations are doing. More importantly it provided ideas on how to collect

data from customers and then follow up on complaints or concerns. Several participants provided information on their survey methods which was helpful in designing a survey form for the Sussex Fire Department. These types of surveys need to be customized to meet local needs. This may include language barriers or other cultural issues specific to individual communities.

As a result of the survey of department personnel (Appendix B) the following recommendations were brought out. Training was developed to improve the conduct of personnel at emergency incidents. This included the individual appearance of personnel, the actions of personnel not directly involved in mitigation of the incident, and information provided to homeowners, victims, and other people involved in the incident. Another result of the recommendations was the development of a press release form used when local news agencies request information. Use of the FEMA United States Fire Administration's *after the Fire! Returning to Normal* (FA-46 March 1987) literature and similar literature available from the American Red Cross is now standard operating procedure at structure fires.

It was recommended that training sessions include information regarding customer service where applicable. As an example, overhaul training will include information on explaining to a homeowner why holes were cut in walls and ceilings to prevent fire extension and reignition. Auto extrication will include specific

documentation in reports explaining the reason various extrication techniques were used. If accidents victims are cognizant of what is going on this will be explained to them at the time of the extrication. This information will also be shared with the press when appropriate to accompany photos that may appear in the news.

The business retention survey (Appendix C) revealed that the business community held the fire department in high regard. The one area that showed an opportunity for improvement was in the Fire Prevention Bureau with fire inspection. A certain degree of hostility towards inspections from any type of agency is expected. However, in a small community these types of problems often have ripple effects. In an effort to improve the departments relations with the business community it was recommended that the fire chief and fire inspector meet with the Sussex/Lisbon Businessman's Professional Association to help improve relations. Past luncheon meetings have proved beneficial in developing better relations with the business community. Individual concerns by business owners are followed up on immediately by the fire chief. This may result in a mediation effort occasionally. When a compromise is worked out the plan is usually developed by the chief and fire inspector working together. This demonstrates support for the inspector while appeasing the business owner. This was a case involving a dispute over the recommended time frames for correcting minor violations of local fire codes.

This research project resulted in several recommendations that were beneficial to the department as it began improving its public image and the delivery of services in a customer friendly manner. The ideas that are selected for implementation will be phased in over a period of time and monitored for effectiveness. Recommendations to departments considering a similar project could be summarized with the following:

1. Start with department personnel in developing plans to improve your program.
2. Work with local businesses and citizens in the community to determine their expectations of the department.
3. Implement programs slowly in an organized fashion to maintain support of personnel. Involve all levels of the organization in development and implementation.
4. At predetermined time intervals review the overall results of the program. Do not be afraid to modify or drop efforts that are not meeting expectations.
5. Look at successful private corporations for models of improving customer service and public relations. Why reinvent the wheel?
6. Share information, including results of program with the community, particularly elected officials. Be sure to give credit where credit is due throughout the organization.

Perhaps the greatest challenge in improving customer service and public relations is shifting paradigms of the personnel within the organization. Even though the

fire department has a monopoly on the service and is doing a good job now doesn't mean that it should be complacent and not strive to meet or exceed the expectations of the public.

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Appendix A**Sussex Fire Department
Emergency Incident Response
Quality Assurance Survey**

How would you rank the courtesy of the 911 dispatcher?

Excellent Good Needs Improvement Not Applicable

How would you rank the courtesy of the fire department personnel?

Excellent Good Needs Improvement Not Applicable

How would you rank the technical skills of the emergency responders?

Excellent Good Needs Improvement Not Applicable

How would you rank the neatness and appearance of the personnel and apparatus?

Excellent Good Needs Improvement Not Applicable

How would you rank the response time of the department?

Excellent Good Needs Improvement Not Applicable

Please provide comments regarding the departments response.

Please provide suggestions on how the Sussex Fire Department can improve service in the future.

Appendix B

**Sussex Fire Department
Quality Assurance/Customer Service Survey**

Summary of Department Personnel Survey

Please respond to each of the following questions. Add comments in the spaces provided with each question. Please provide suggestions.

Does the Sussex Fire Department adequately address customer service and satisfaction in its emergency incident operation?

Yes	No
(36)	(14)

Summary of comments

More time should be spent with families of victims explaining actions of department
 More follow-up information should be shared with crews after an incident
 Personnel should be more professional at scene
 Too often personnel not in proper uniform at scene (EMS calls)

Do the training and orientation programs adequately address the importance of customer service and satisfaction?

Yes	No
(12)	(38)

Summary of comments

More time should be spent with each session/topic of training addressing public relations
 More time should be spent with new personnel on this area
 Bring in outside speakers to address this topic

Do you feel that most of our contact with the public yields positive feeling toward the department?

Yes	No
(48)	(2)

Summary of comments

Victims need more information regarding actions taken by department
 Bystanders often don't understand what is going on

Please provide suggestions regarding improving customer services/satisfaction.

Summary of comments

More inservice training for personnel	More Pub Ed for general public
More information provided to newspapers	Recruits need more training in this area
Send officers to seminars and classes	This is a waste of time

Appendix C

**Summary of Business Retention Survey
for the Village of Sussex**

The following is a summary of selected data taken from the Business Retention Survey conducted in 1997 by the Sussex Village staff.

Business Owners Contact with Village Departments 1997 Survey

<u>Service</u>	<u>Contact Satisfied</u>	<u>Contact Dissatisfied</u>	<u>Contact NoOpinion</u>	<u>No Contact</u>
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Manufacturing Firms

Fire Department	40.74%	0.00%	0.00%	59.26%
Fire Inspector	85.19%	11.11%	0.00%	3.70%

Retail Firms

Fire Department	36.07%	1.64%	1.64%	60.66%
Fire Inspector	76.67%	10.00%	11.67%	1.67%

Business Owners Evaluation of Local Services 1997 Survey

Manufacturing Firms

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Fire protection services satisfactory?	100.00%	0.00%

Retail Firms

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Fire protection services satisfactory?	98.36%	1.64%

Appendix D**Executive Fire Officer Class
Summary of Customer Satisfaction Survey**

1. Type of fire department.

a. Volunteer	b. Paid-on-call	c. Combination	d. Career
(0)	(0)	(9)	(11)
2. Population served.

a. <5000	b. 5000-10000	c. 10000-50000	d. >50000
(1)	(1)	(9)	(9)
3. Service area is (select all that apply):

a. Rural	b. Suburban	c. Urban	d. Industrial/Commercial
(3)	(10)	(12)	(3)
4. Services provided by department (select all that apply).

a. Fire	b. EMS	c. Haz Mat	d. Other special services
(20)	(19)	(14)	(12)
5. Does your department train its personnel regarding public relations and customer service?

a. No	b. Yes
(11)	(9)
6. Does your EMS service receive quality assurance reports from a medical director or hospital?

a. No	b. Yes	c. N/A
(3)	(16)	(1)
7. Do your incident response crews hold post incident analysis discussions following a call?

a. No	b. Yes	c. Regularly	d. Occasionally	e. Seldom
(10)	(10)	(3)	(4)	(3)
8. Does your department have a formal customer satisfaction assessment program?

a. No	b. Yes
(14)	(6)
9. What type of customer satisfaction program does your organization use (describe briefly)?

Comments summarized on next page

10. Do you use standard forms to survey customer satisfaction? (Please include copies)

a. No	b. Yes
(11)	(9)
11. Please describe a change your organization has made due to a customer service issue?

Comments summarized on next page

12. Briefly describe how a customer complaint would be handled by your organization.

Comments summarized on next page

Appendix D**Executive Fire Officer Class
Summary of Customer Satisfaction Survey**

9. What type of customer satisfaction program does your organization use (describe briefly)?

Comments summarized

Post Cards	Surveys with follow-up calls	Hospital Feedback
Door-to-door	Survey of patients transported	Surveys Cards
Monthly Survey Forms	Fire Prevention Week Survey	Random Surveys
Survey cards	Citywide-general services survey	

11. Please describe a change your organization has made due to a customer service issue?

Comments summarized

Internal investigations
Instituted survey program
Increased Pub Ed Programs

12. Briefly describe how a customer complaint would be handled by your organization.

Comments summarized

Directed to Chief
Deputy Chief handles
Battalion Chief on duty handles
Administrative Assistant handles
OIC event follows up
Administrative assistant assigns to appropriate officer, 30 days to follow up
Handled at lowest possible level
District Chief within 48 hours
Chief or Assistant Chief handles
Division Chief in-charge handles